La Salle Street Design Guidelines

Produced for

The City of Chicago
Department of Planning

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

July 1989

Introduction

This project, produced for the City of Chicago in July, 1989, represents one of the first attempts to develop design guidelines for a significant portion of downtown Chicago. The motivating idea, that the "essential" character of the street is worth preserving, develops from two facts: that LaSalle Street is one of only a few mature streets in an continually evolving city, and that conventional zoning has little capacity to preserve important elements of the city.

While the history of the street is ample reason for preservation from one point of view, it must be stressed that the urban qualities of the street, those qualities that make it a recognizable place in the city, arise directly from physical fact. A basic premise is that the extraordinary impact of the street is due more to its form that its historical content. There is much of historical value on the street, but individual buildings should be protected through landmarking and other means. Landmarking cannot protect the unity of the whole street.

LaSalle Street, between the Chicago Board of Trade and Wacker Drive, is one of the most well known and significant urban spaces in Chicago as well as a symbol of the financial center of Chicago and of the Midwest.

This is a study of the forms and patterns of LaSalle Street. Its canyon-like stepping walls, the light reflected from warm sandstone cladding, the architectural character and detail of the street, and its sense of hierarchy and progression from the gateway announcing the northern end to the southern culmination at the art-deco mass of the Chicago Board of Trade, are all elementally connected to physical space, not time.

The intent of these guidelines is threefold:

First, to help those involved in development on LaSalle Street to cultivate a sensitivity to a unique urban situation. Though relatively few development sites remain on the street, these few could have very significant positive or adverse effects upon the street.

Second, to identify the strong characteristic qualities of the street that have established it as a major urban event in Chicago's built fabric as well as it's history.

And third, to develop a set of design/planning guidelines that will help ensure that future construction along LaSalle Street will build upon rather than erode its strength. Within this context and for the purposes of this study a variety of techniques have been used. The traditional urban design tools of photography, drawing and model making, have been integrated with the large-scale application of visually oriented interactive computer software. The computer has been used as a graphic tool in many ways, both analytical and representational. It is a three-dimensional desk-top model of the city with the capacity to illustrate the urban visual field at scales ranging from pedestrian to skyline. It offers the opportunity to quickly test alternate visions of form, light, and movement in comparative fashion. It is used as a collector of the patterns of the street, functioning both to present these patterns in an ordered, accessible way, and to act as a catalyst by allowing one to overlay individual patterns and discover their interactions. It has facilitated a remarkably direct, visual investigation of the city and demonstrated that the visually oriented computer has become a very powerful urban design tool.

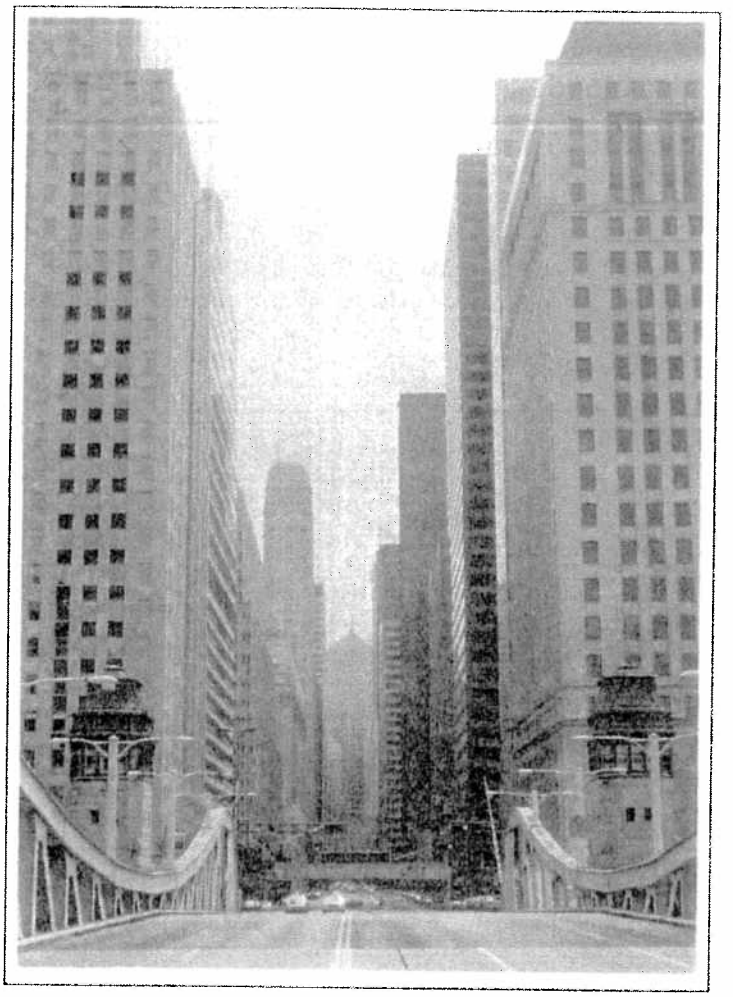
The success of any effort to preserve the street and yet allow or even encourage development lies in the degree to which the value of the situation can be conveyed in convincing manner. And in the degree to which developers, architects, officials, and the community accept and embrace the ideals which this document seeks to put into effect.

To aid in this attempt, this document is arranged in four parts, each in the form which seems most appropriate. The first presents some views of the street as a reference and in order to reacquaint readers with the street.

The second part is a primarily visual presentation of the significant history, forms, and patterns of the street. These diagrams illustrate and explain the formal analysis, and try to focus attention on the elements which contribute most significantly to the qualities and character of LaSalle Street.

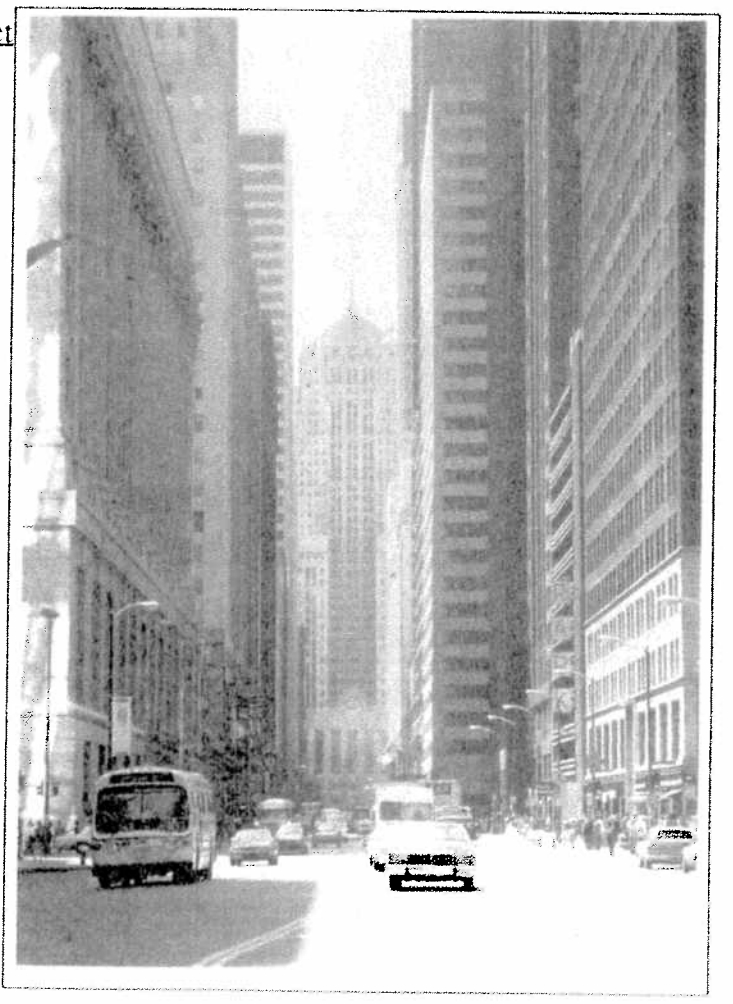
The third part, the guidelines themselves, is entirely in written form. The written word can fulfill two functions simultaneously, to be both quite specific and quite general, in a way that visual information cannot. The intent is to foster an inventive interpretation of the "rules"; to encourage a certain empathy with process and principle. To this end, the guidelines are presented in outline form.

Views of the Street



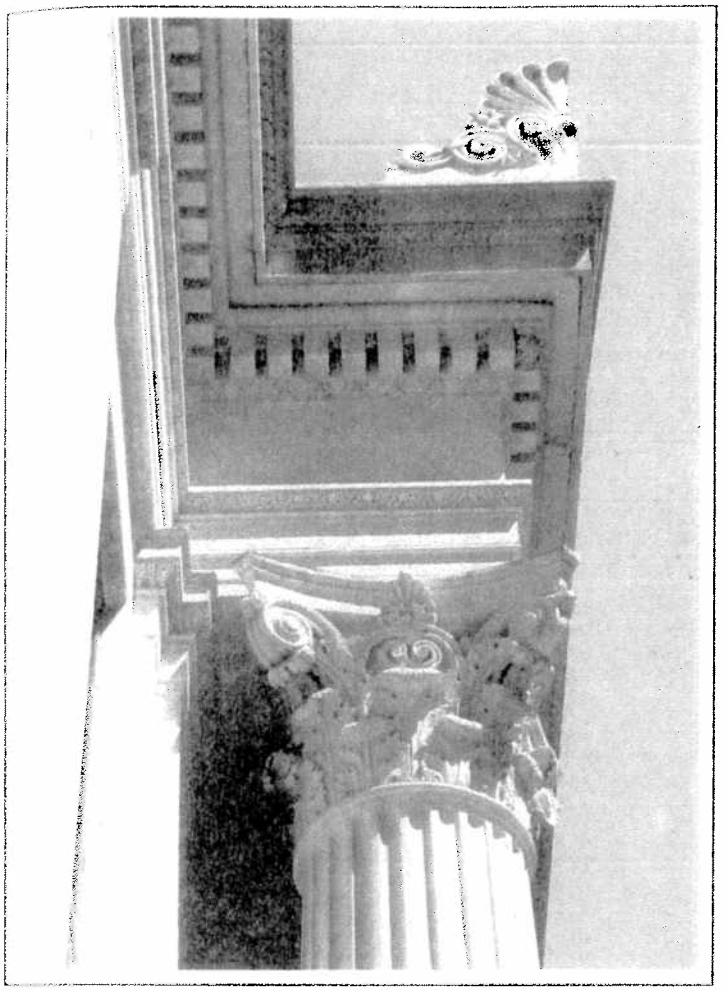
View South from the River

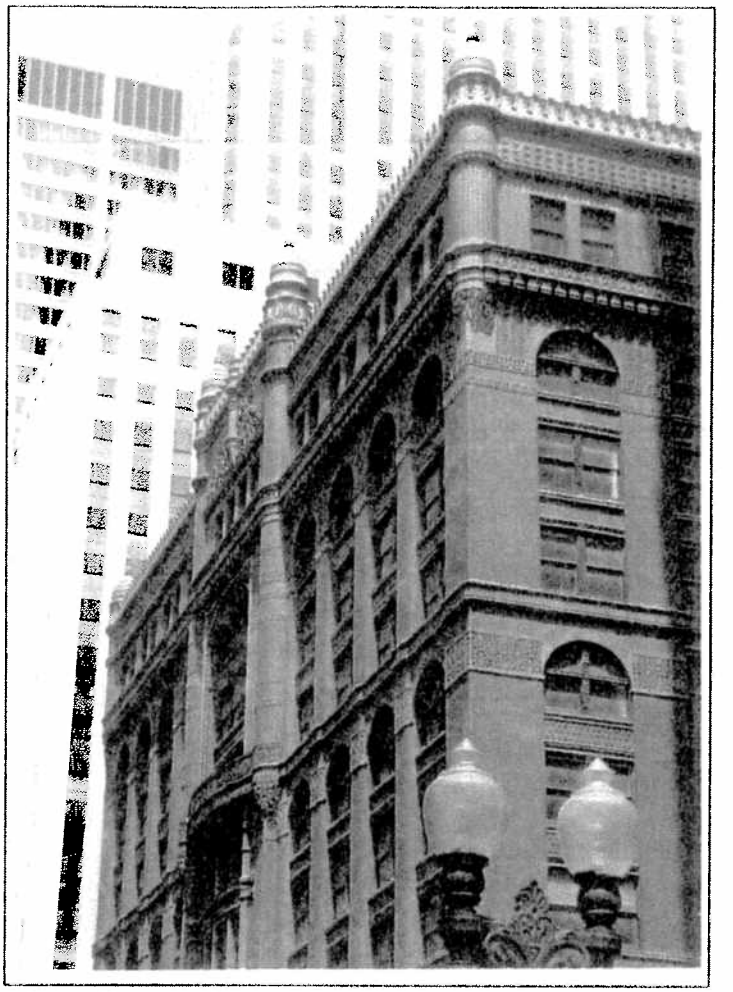
View South from Randolph Street



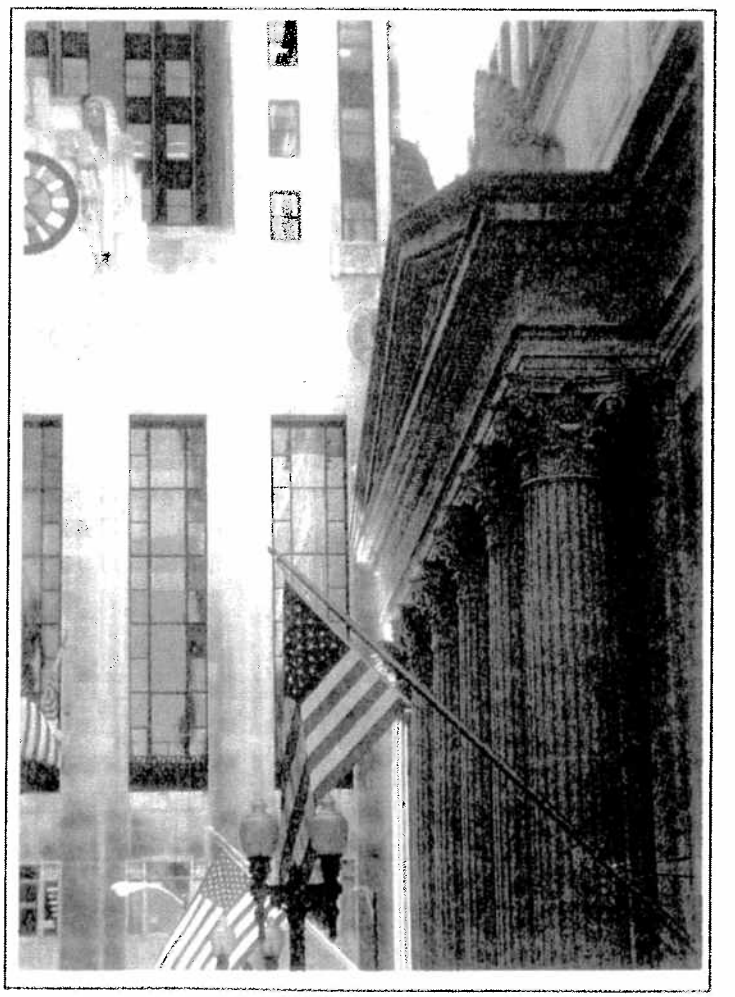
View South from Madison Street

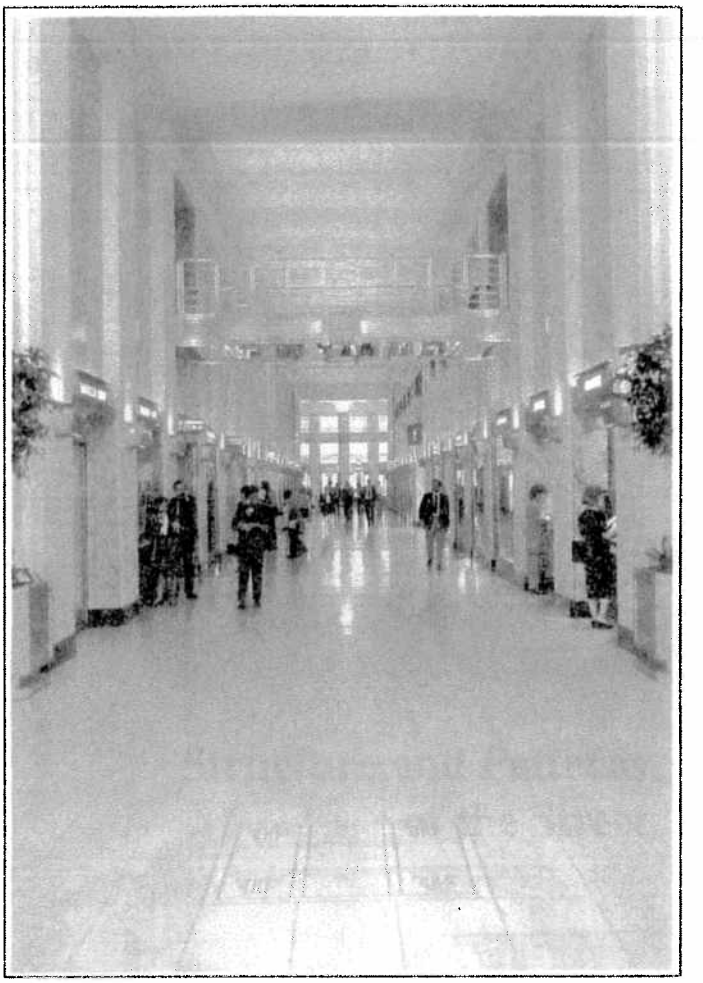
The "Urban Room" at the South End of the Street





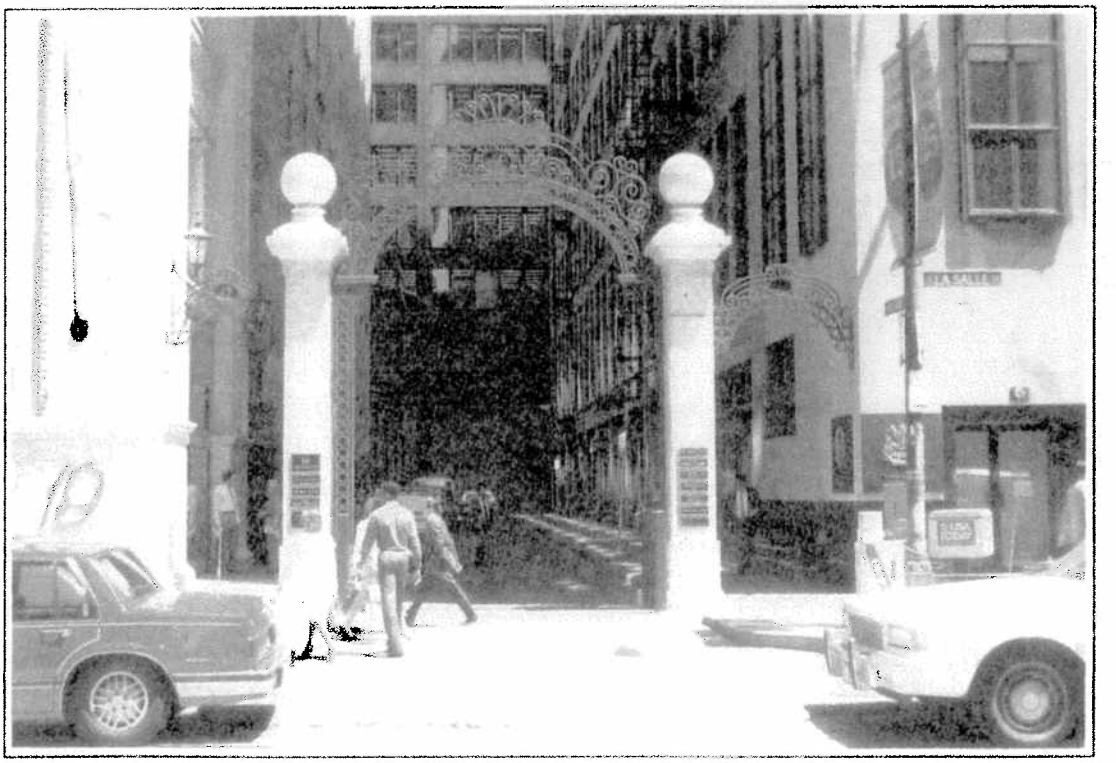
Examples of the Detail along the Street



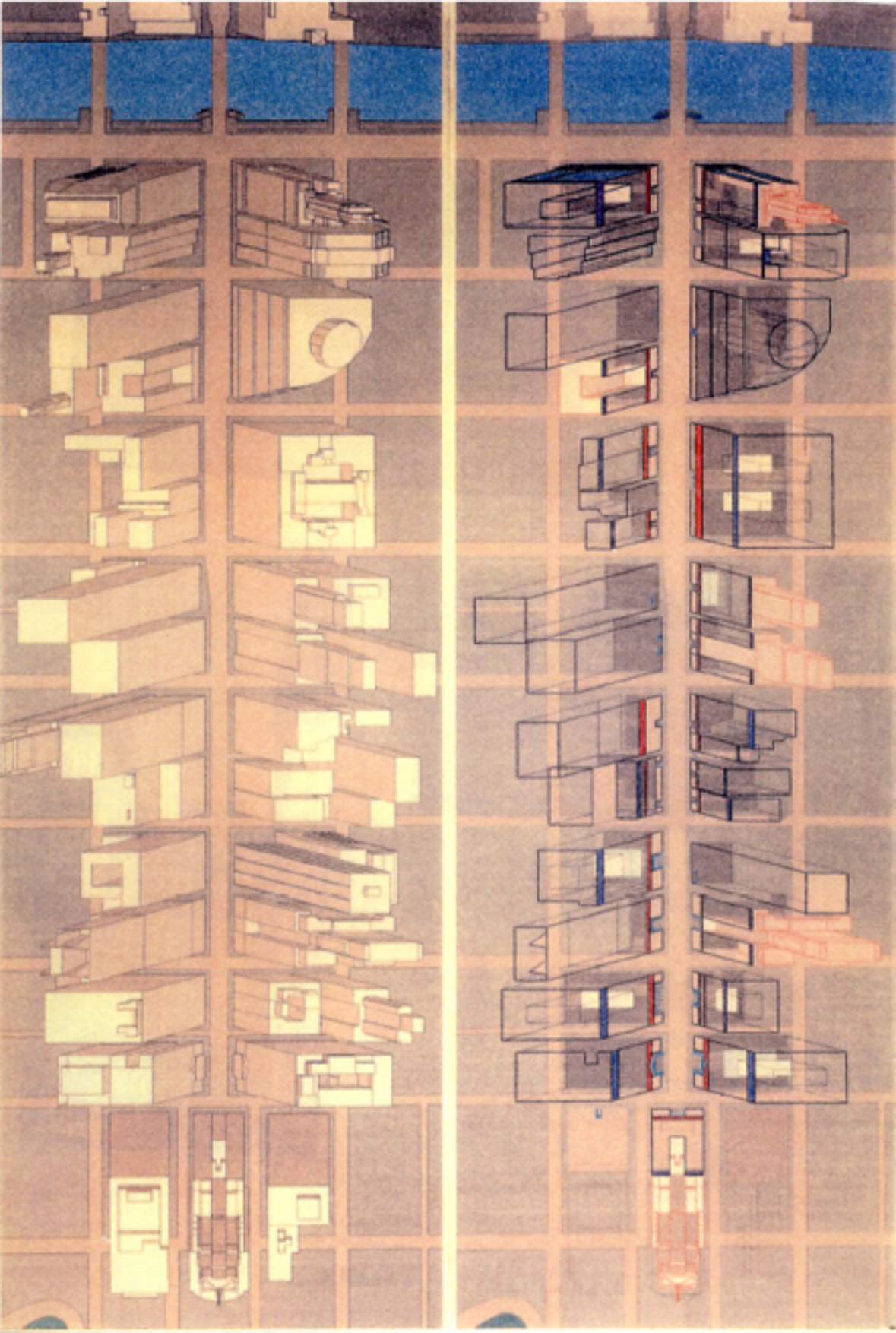


One of the Many Interior Arcades on LaSalle Street

Arcade Place -- a Pedestrian Oriented Side Street

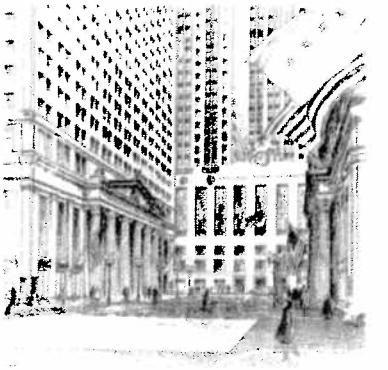


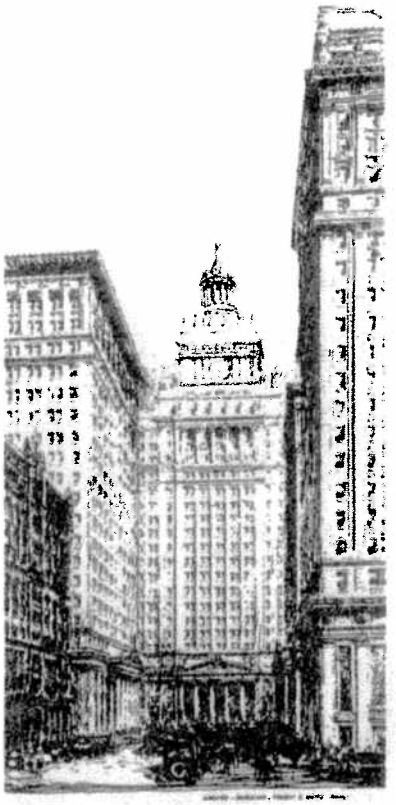
Structure and Patterns of the Street

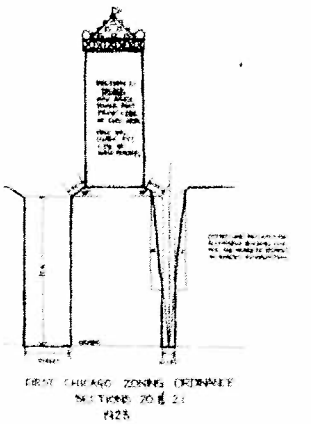


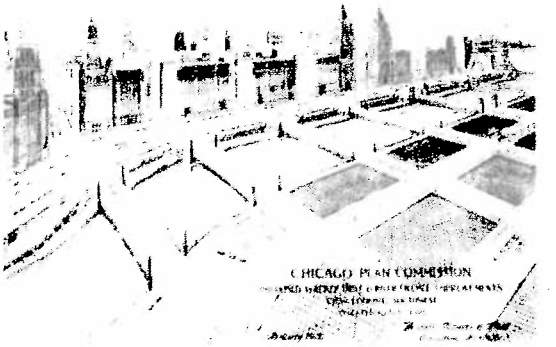
"Anatomical" Diagram

An overlay diagram containing of all the patterns of the street.









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History of the Form of the Street

--Historical intent evident in the terminal "room" at the south end of the street--

--Historical ideas of "gateway" at the north end--

--The zoning code that shaped the street initially--

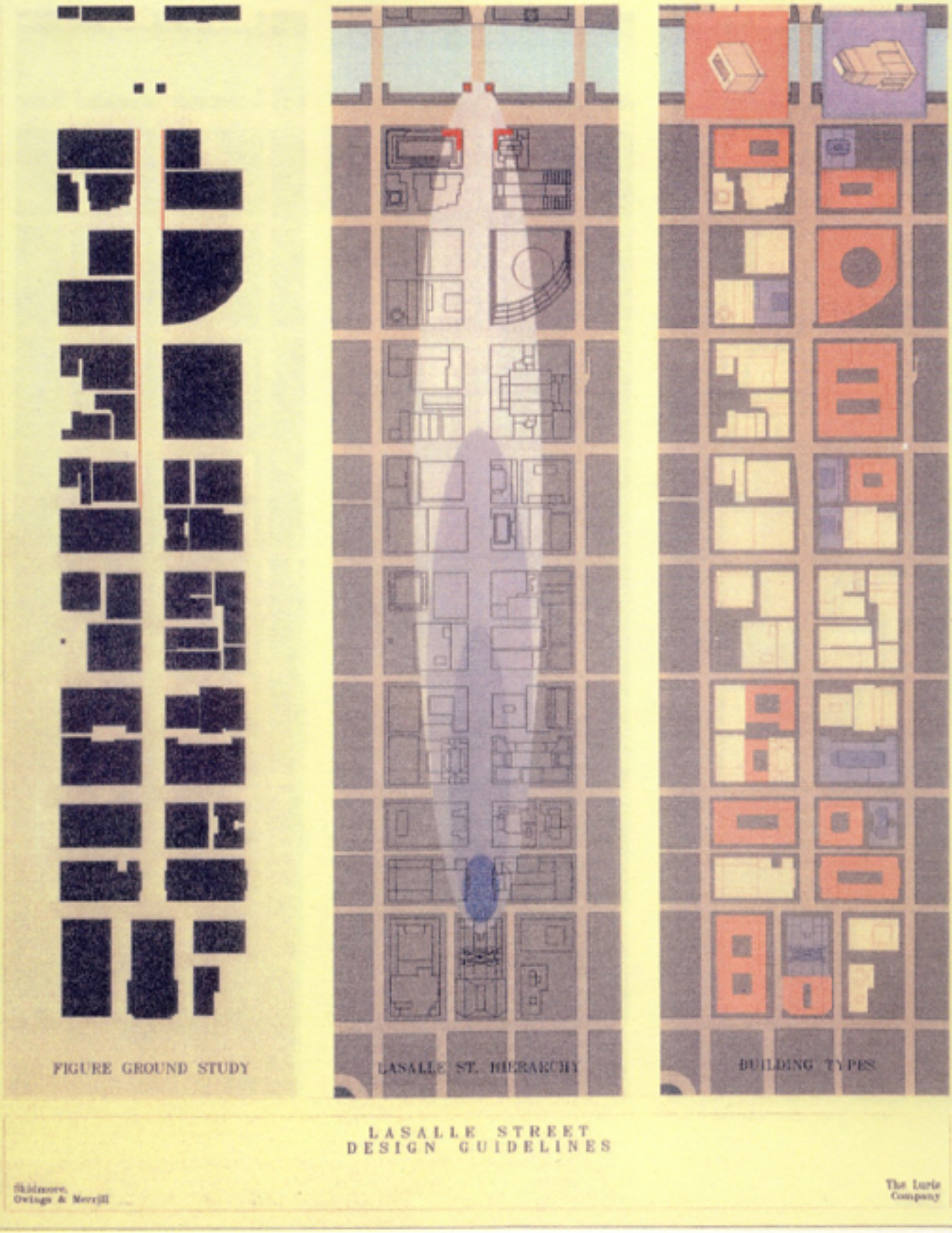
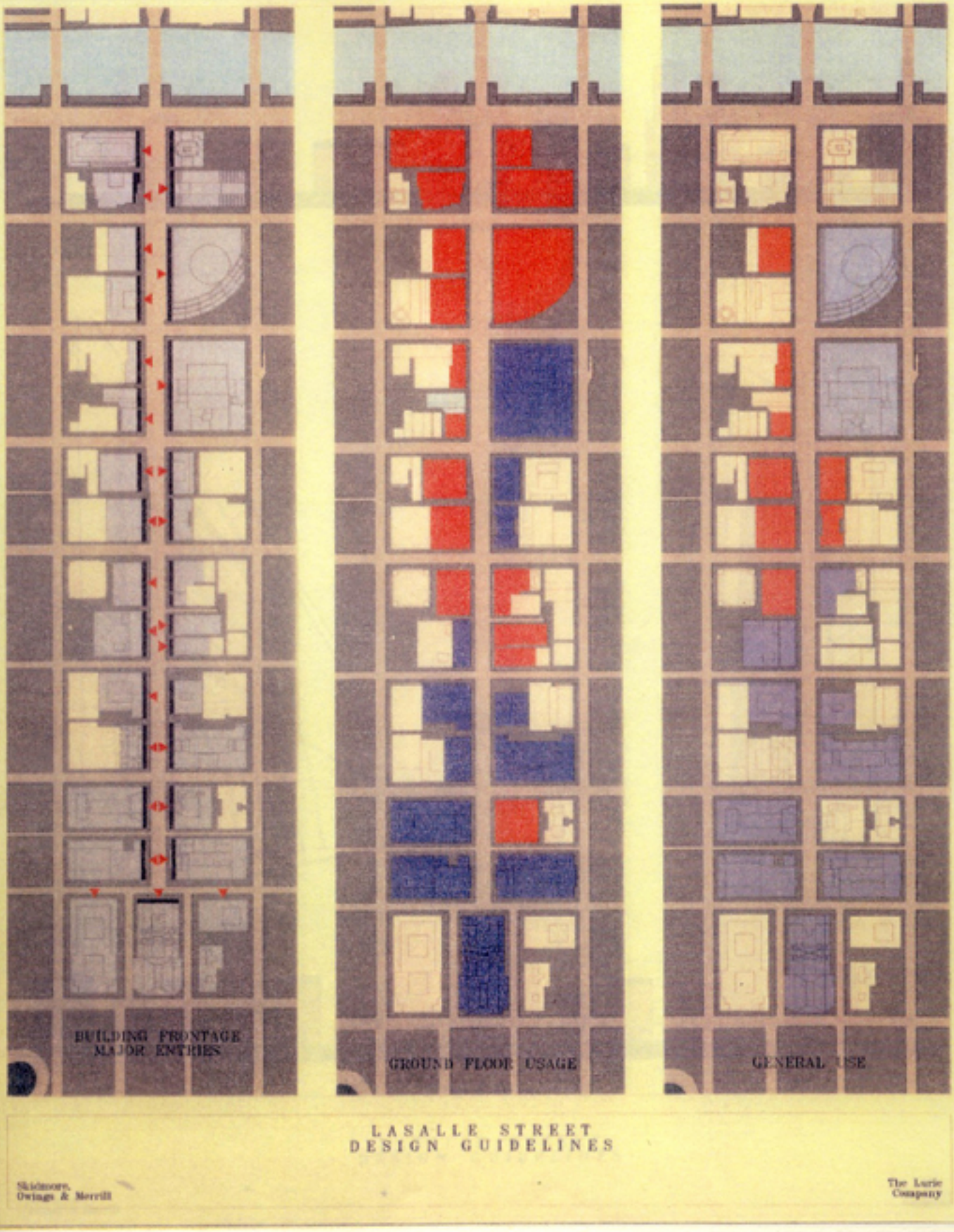


Figure Ground / Street Hierarchy / Building Types

The figure ground and the hierarchy diagrams show the progressively more intense nature of the street as one moves south from the Gateway at the river, down the gradually narrowing street, to the terminal "room" at the Chicago Board of Trade.

Two building typologies predominate on the street: Atrium and "Armchair".

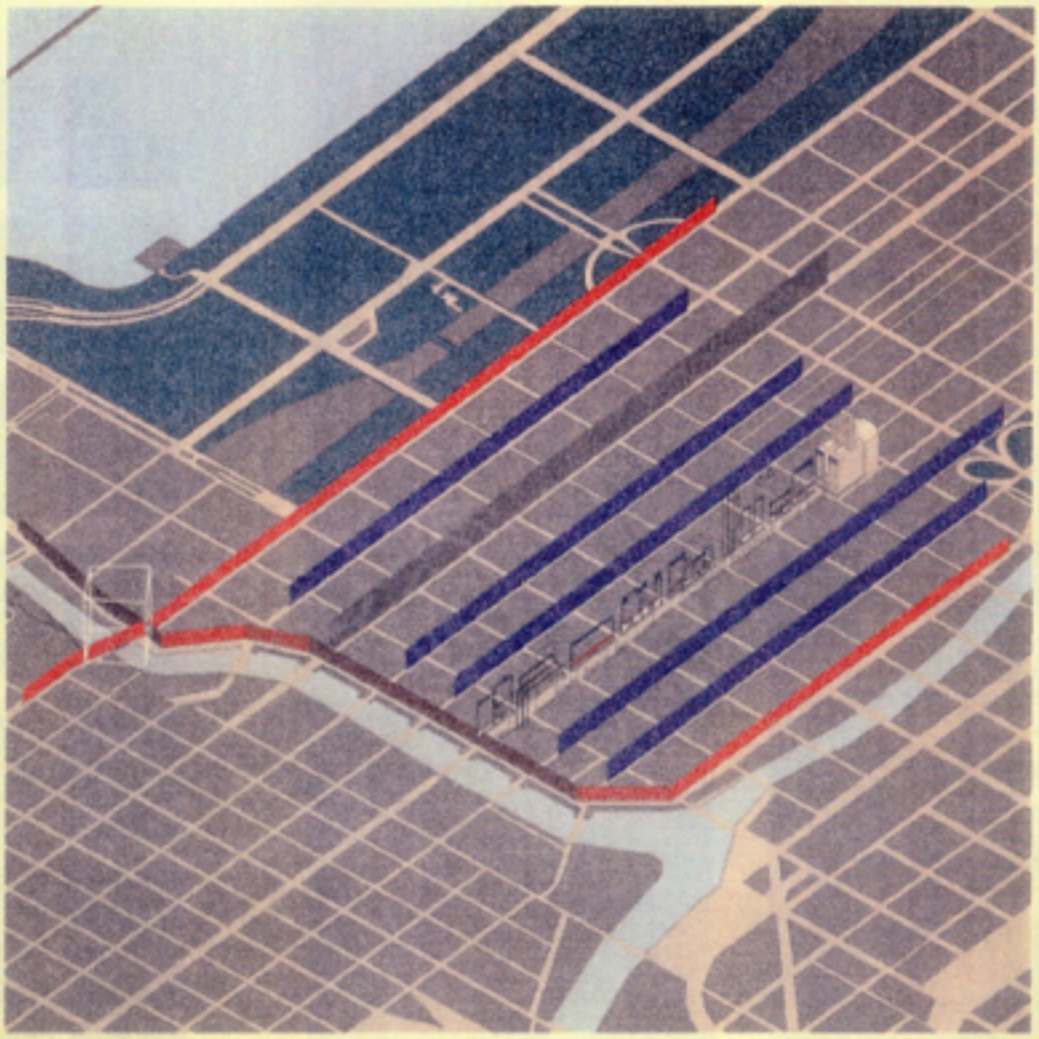


Building Frontages / Ground Level Use / General Use

--Almost all buildings on the street fit within a 1/2 block module with centralized facades and entries--

--Banking / Institutional ground level uses predominate on the south half; service retail on the north--

--General uses divide the street as well - South : Banking / North : Legal--



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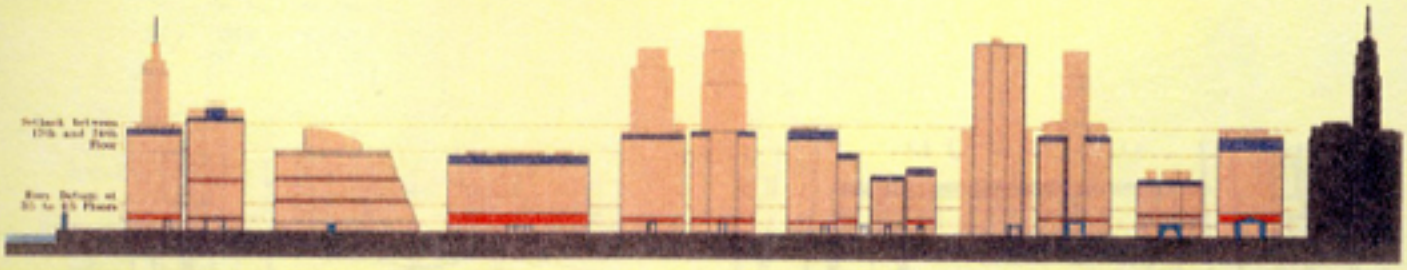
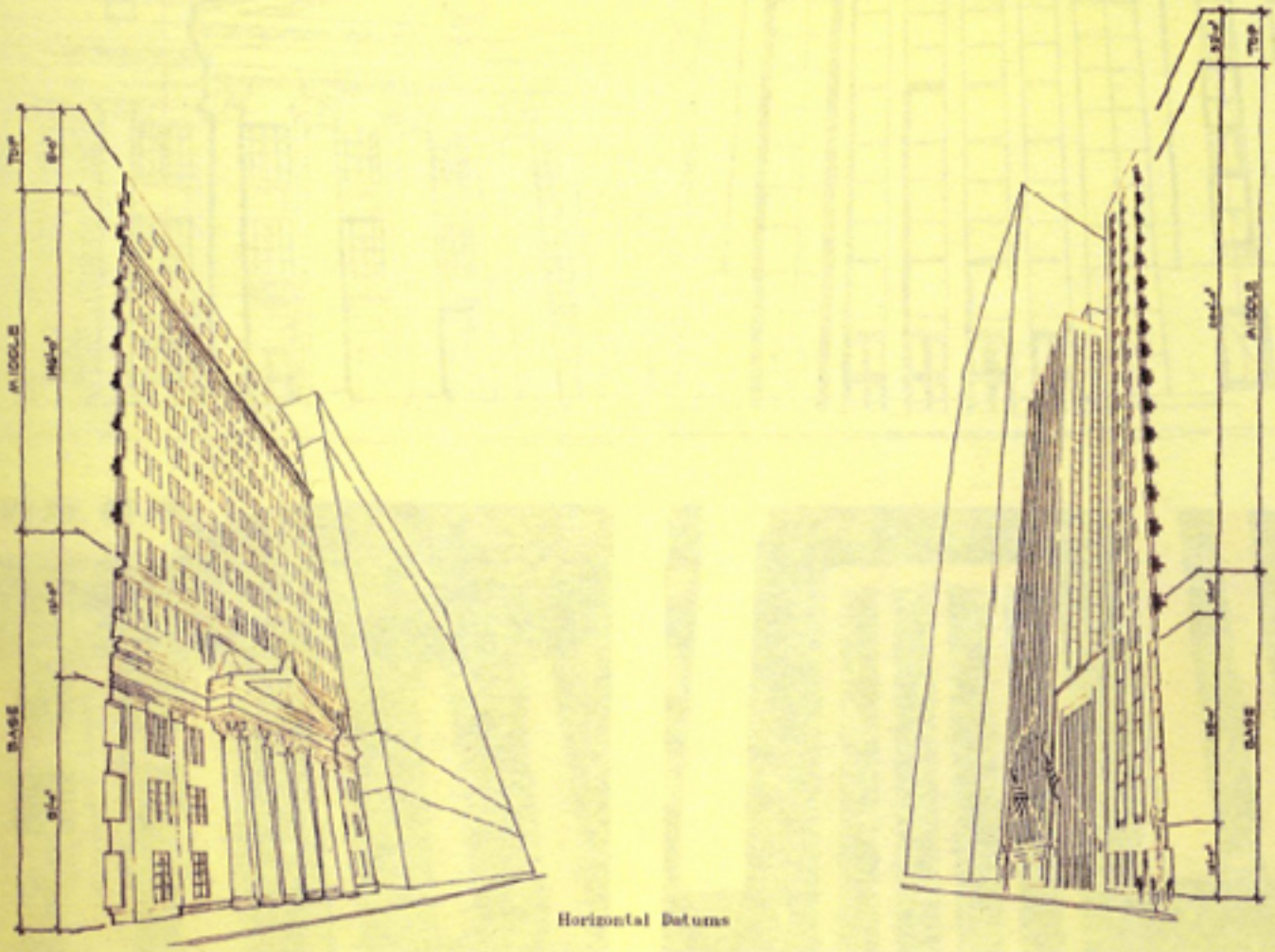
North / South Streets Predominate in the Loop

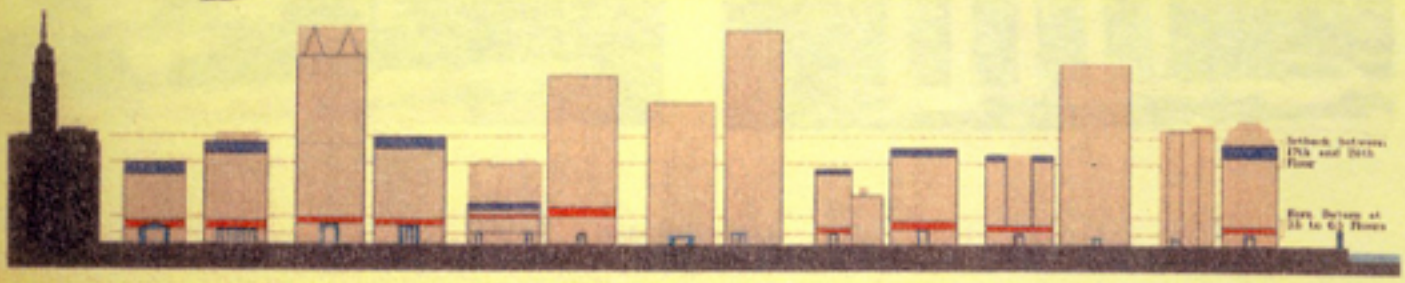
Street silhouettes demonstrate the unique position and character of LaSalle within this larger pattern



East Elevation



Horizontal Datums



West Elevation

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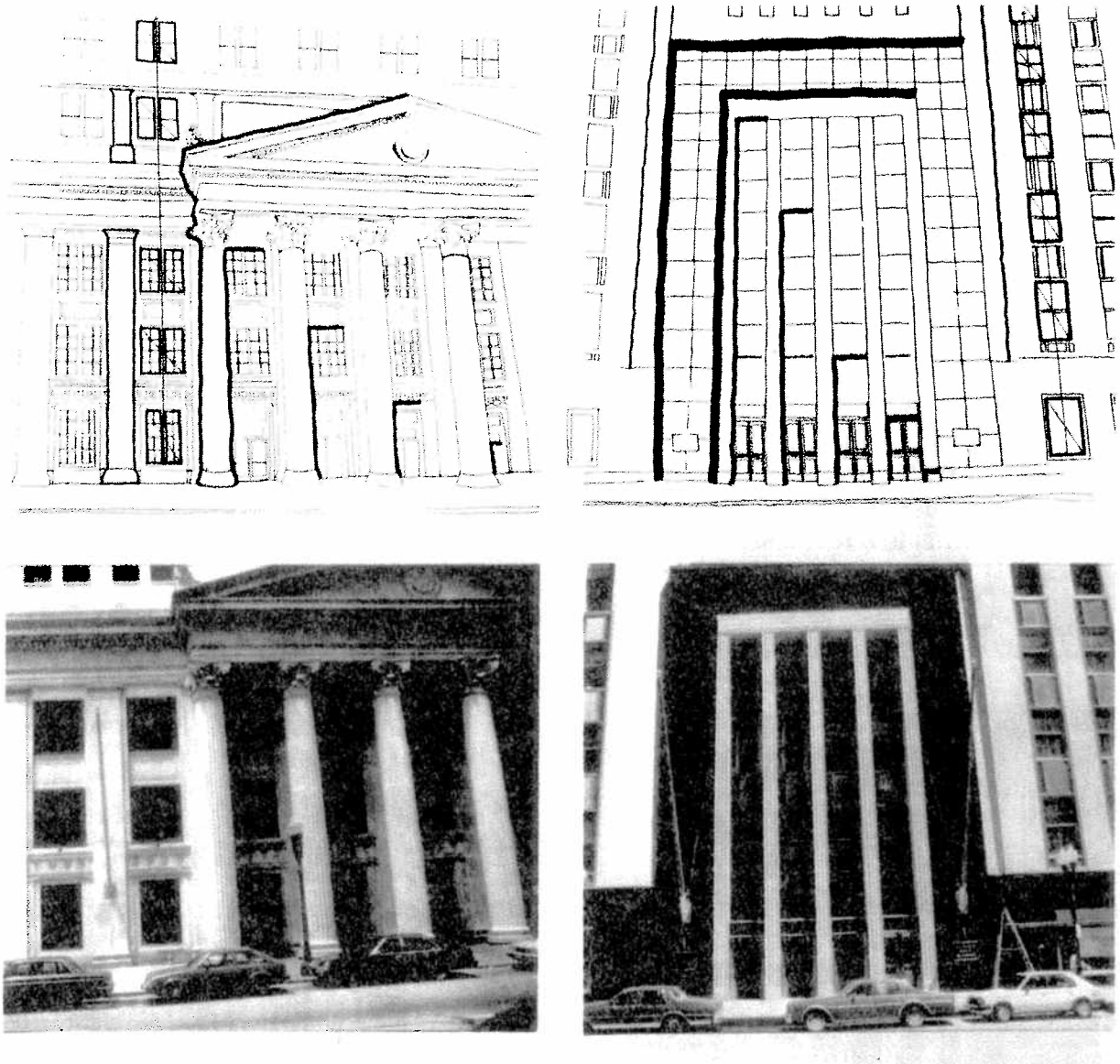
Horizontal Datum

The horizontal datum which exists at the 3 to 6 story level develops a virtual ceiling by casting darker shadows on the lower facades. This pattern persists across stylistic and temporal bounds. A secondary zone is usually developed with punched openings and light colored stone contributing to the quality of light in the street.



Scale Relationships

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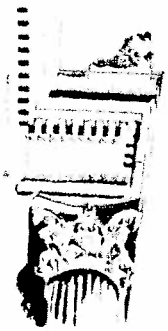
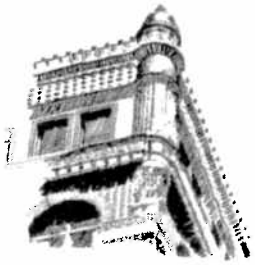
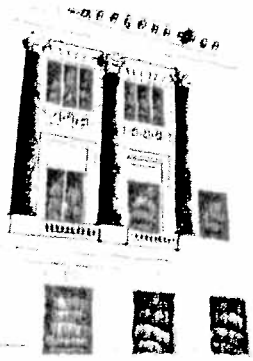
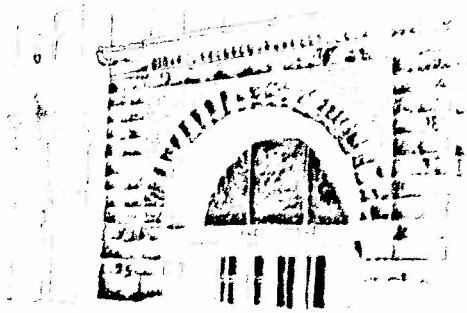
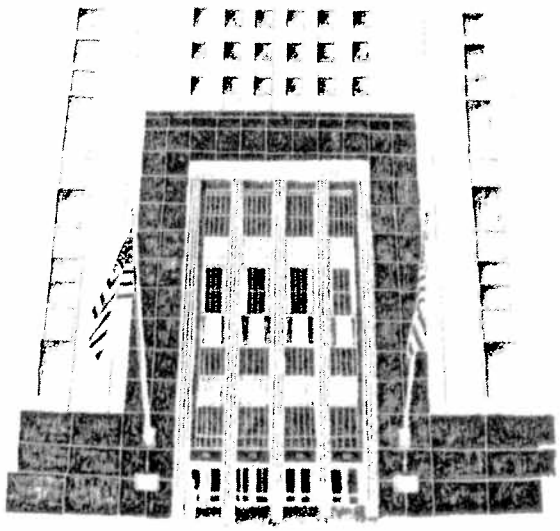
Scale Relationships

A series of scale relationships exist within the fabric of the street that mediate between the human scale and the city scale. These relationships occur in buildings of very different style and establish a kind of civility rarely found in Chicago or elsewhere.





Detail

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Detail

As with scale relationships, the pattern of detail on the buildings of LaSalle Street lie outside style and are found to possess a consistency of texture, light and shade, and repetitive qualities.

The Guidelines

OBJECTIVES:

- To develop a sensitivity to the unique urban fabric of LaSalle Street.

- To identify the strong characteristic qualities of the street that have established it as a major urban event in Chicago's built fabric as well as its history.

- To develop a set of design/planning guidelines that will help ensure that future construction along LaSalle Street will build upon rather than erode its strength.

MAJOR QUALITIES:

Canyon-like Corridor - LaSalle Street is composed something like a natural canyon. Its walls step back in increments, admitting more light as they move higher.

Quality of Light - The quality of light in the street is one of its most subtle and yet significant elements. It arises from a number of cooperating factors including the color and material of the buildings, the solid/void pattern of windows and the setbacks of the facades.

Architectural Character - The buildings on the street are almost without exception of a high degree of historic or architectural significance.

Hierarchy / Progression - The street is unique in Chicago for its sense of progression from the gateway elements at the north end to the intense, roomlike area at the south.

Tenor of the Street - The tenor of LaSalle Street, the solid and forthright financial center of Chicago, arises directly from its physical character: stone buildings in an institutional manner, organized rhythmically along the street.

Inhabitability - The "best" LaSalle Street buildings mediate between the scale of the City and the pedestrian enclave. Through a rich assemblage of architectural elements the street is both grand and intimate at the same time.

Exemplary (urban design) buildings on the street: Continental Bank, Federal Reserve, CBOT, and the Field Building.

MASSING/ARTICULATION:

- Build to the property line on LaSalle Street and within 100 feet of LaSalle on all bordering street frontages.
- Buildings should have a half-block wide frontage on LaSalle Street.

FACADE ARTICULATION

- A base, mid-portion and top of the building should be articulated as such. The base should be articulated as such. The base should be 3 to 6 stories tall and developed to continue the institutional character of the street. The ground floor should be differentiated from the rest of the base. The mid-section should be primarily vertical in character and have some terminating event about 2 floors tall at the first setback level.
- The facade on LaSalle Street should have a centralized character and contain the major ceremonial entry for the building.

SETBACKS

- A major setback should occur at a point between the 20th and 23rd floor. buildings should setback a minimum of 15 feet (from the street wall) above this point.
- A second setback, minimum 5 feet, should occur at about the 40 story level.

HORIZONTAL DATUMS

- The building should have three substantial horizontal expressions approximately at levels 3 to 6, 20 to 23, and 37 to 40, that relate formally to the other buildings on the street.
- The level 3 to 6 expression should be the most compound and articulated in nature of the three. It should help to develop a level of shade and shadow on the lower facade that is generally darker than the portion above. It is the most important of the three horizontal datums in mediating between the pedestrian scale and the grand scale of the city.

OPENINGS

Upper:

- Openings above the first Horizontal Datum should generally have a character ranging between punched and vertically expressed.
- Solid surfaces (i.e. masonry) should comprise an average of 60 to 75 percent of the elevation.
- At least 80 percent of the glass should be set back 5 or more inches from the facade.

Lower:

- Openings below and within the first horizontal datum

should be articulated to develop deeper shade and shadow, and to enhance the institutional quality of the street.

- Surfaces within this zone should be developed to continue the institutional character of the street.

SCALE ELEMENTS

- The building should be designed with elements that develop a series of normal scale relationships within the range from pedestrian scale to city scale.

DETAIL

- In general detail should be of high quality, compatible with the highest quality buildings on the street. The use of detail should be encouraged to further enhance the pedestrian experience and to assist in differentiating zones of the building mass and composition.
- Detail should be present in amounts similar to the patterns that exist in the exemplary buildings on the street. The detail in these buildings is concentrated in the base and other horizontal datums.
- Accessory detail, such as flags and the characteristic metal signage present on the street, should be encouraged.

MATERIALS:

- In general materials should be architecturally rich and of high quality, compatible with the highest quality buildings on the street. They should be selected to reinforce the characteristic quality of light within the street.
- Cladding should be predominantly light colored masonry (i.e. Indiana Limestone) compatible with the exemplary buildings on the street.
- Accent material can be freer in color and material.
- Glass should be clear and not be highly reflective, mirrored, or darkly tinted.

USE:

GROUND FLOOR

- Retail uses, generally accessed from arcades or lobbies, should be encouraged. Retail entries on side streets are fine, but the ground floor exterior on LaSalle should be institutional in type, (i.e. not articulated as shopfront).
- Through-arcades should be encouraged, though not required.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES:

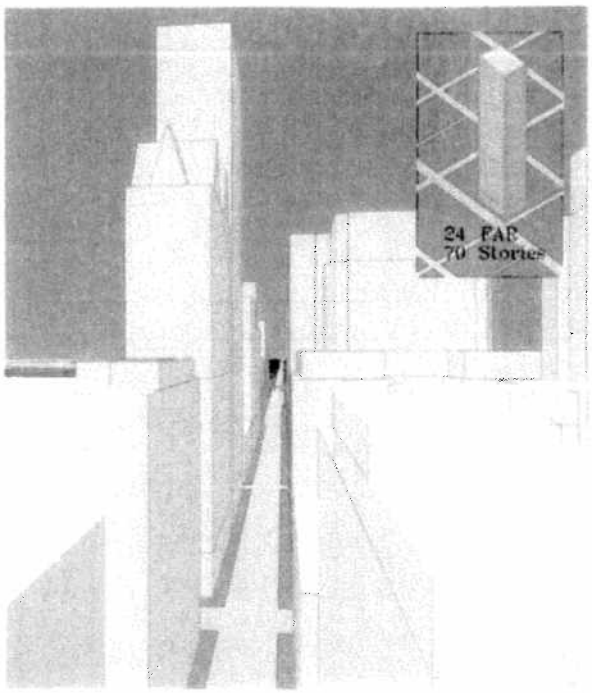
SECOND FLOOR

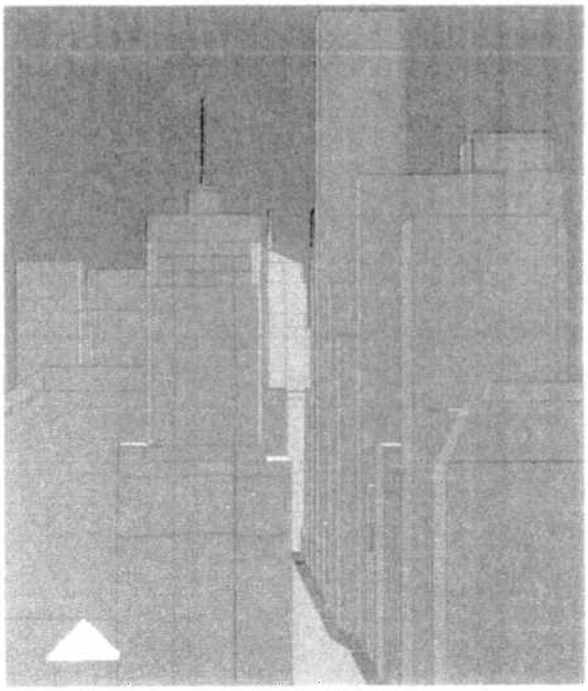
- The development of monumental second floor rooms should be encouraged though not required.

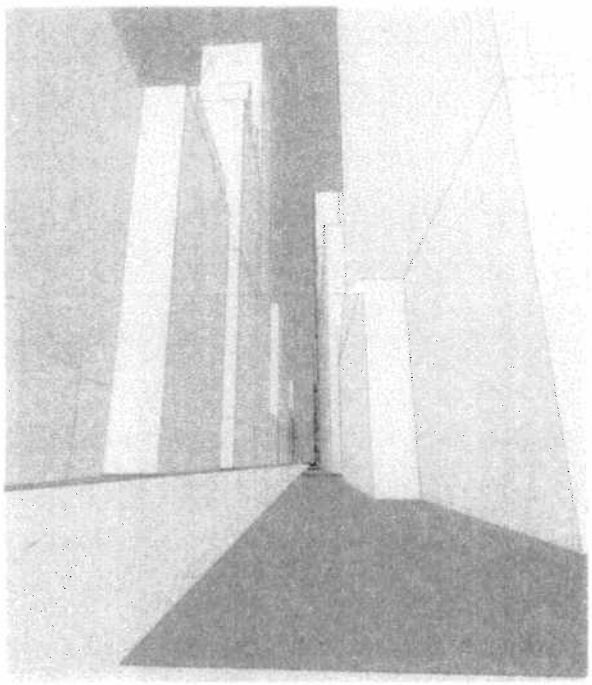
INTERSECTING STREETS

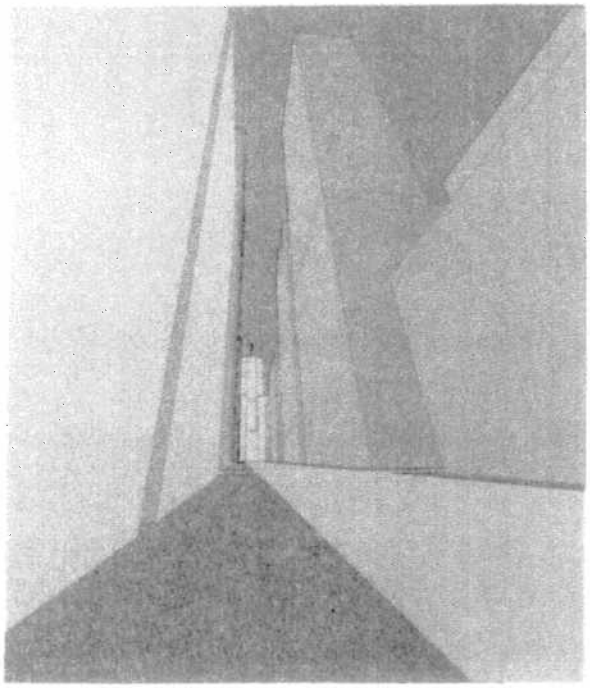
- Certain types of intersecting streets have the potential of adding a great deal of life and interest to LaSalle Street. Arcade Place is a fairly well developed example of this. Quincy Street holds similar potential.

F.A.R. and the Guidelines









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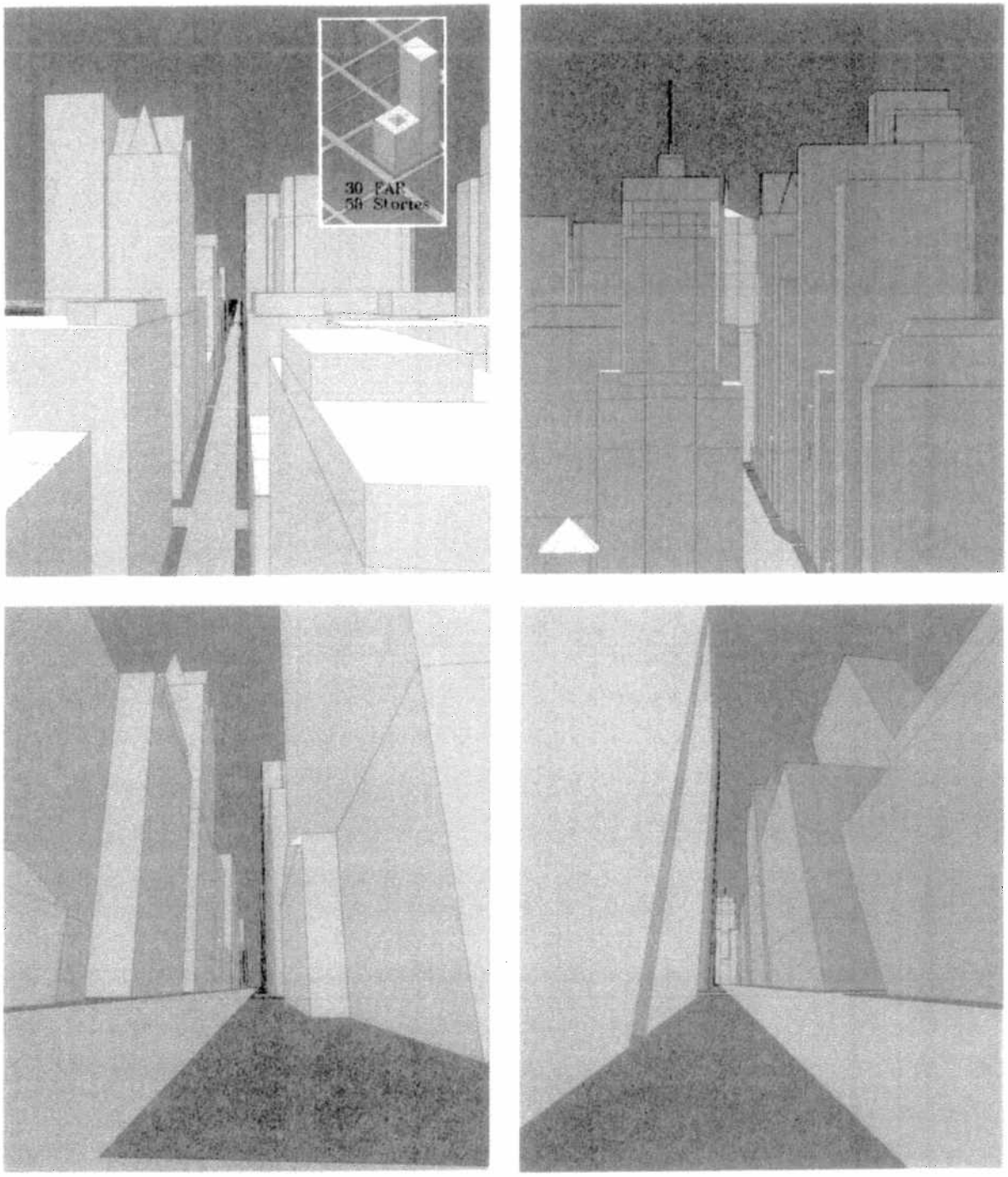
Three Examples

The three examples which follow demonstrate the ineffectiveness of conventional zoning to preserve the characteristic quality of the street. The first, at 24 FAR (above), is an as-of-right massing allowed under the basic zoning, but disregards the Guidelines.



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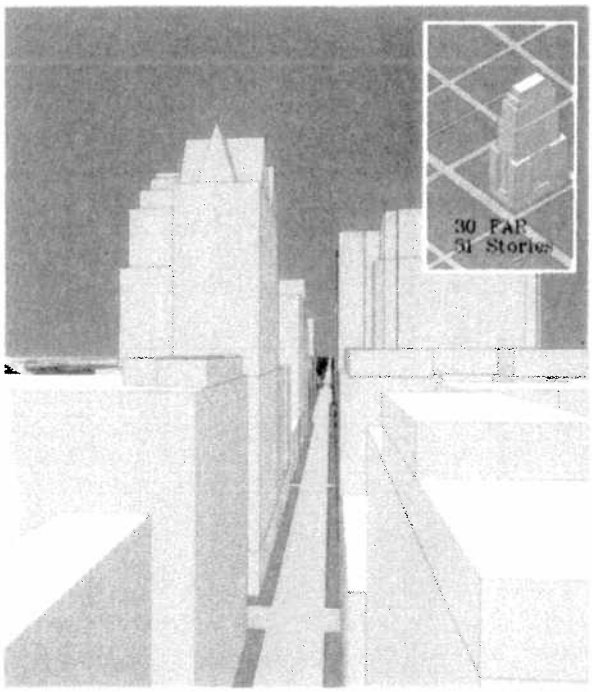
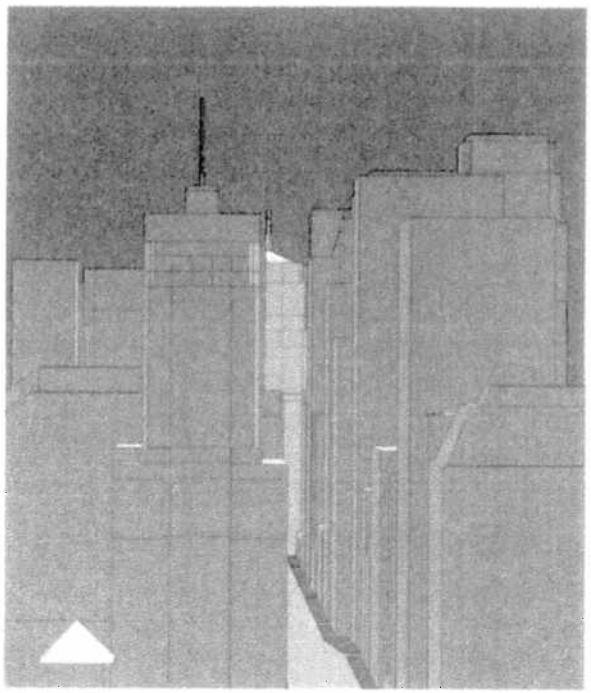
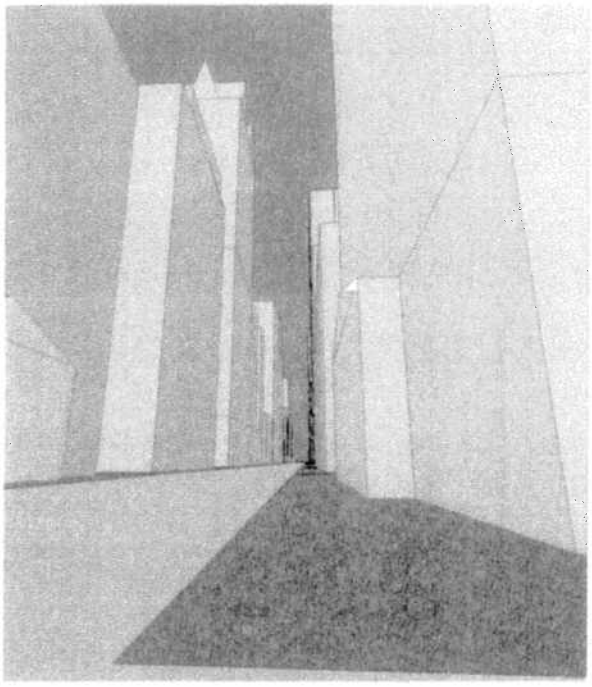
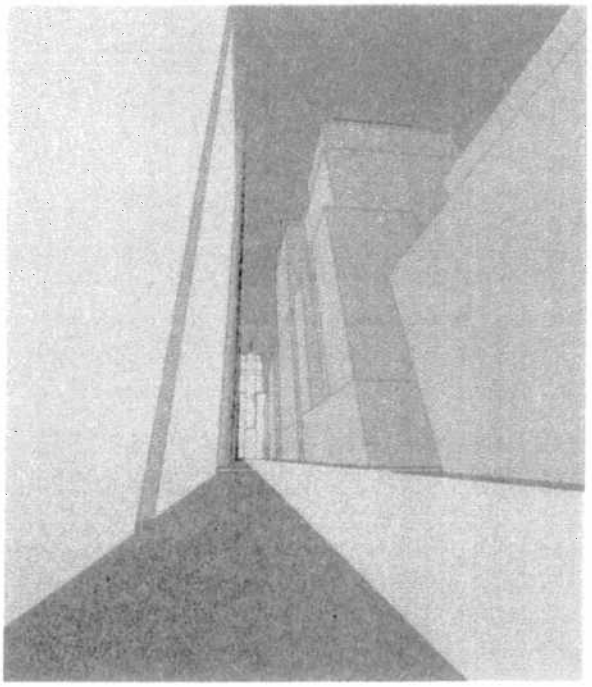
Block & Tower

This example exceeds conventional FAR limits, but shows one possibility for massing that would conform to the guidelines. In this case, the front block represents an existing atrium building which is reconfigured internally to link to the new tower in the rear.









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New "Armchair" Type

This example exceeds conventional FAR limits as well. It conforms to the guidelines with a different approach, one related to the other significant building form on the street: a stepping building form similar to the Field Building or the CBOT. Each of these demonstrates a massing alternative that attempts to perpetuate the special qualities of LaSalle street, and to preserve this district within the city.